

4-15-99

Thursday, April 15, 1999

Spec

# WVCW FM?

## FM student radio a possible future for VCU

Tom Netherland  
CT SPECTRUM EDITOR

Listen. Listen closely and you soon may hear low-power radio stations dot the dial in Downtown Richmond.

Such as VCU's own WVCW that students at MCVH eventually will hear — maybe.

"We have a problem with getting heard," said Program Director Paul Ladd.

Broadcasting on AM 640 and MediaOne

***'We have a problem with getting heard.'***

--Program Director Paul Ladd

cable radio FM 950, the station operates well within the Federal Communications Commission's low-power status guidelines, meaning all transmitters less than 1,000 watts of broadcasting power.

"We're underground radio," Ladd said. "We're not mainstream. It's college alternative yet with a mix of styles."

WVCW's low power, he said, gives its neophyte discjockeys a less imposing presence from which to learn.

When the FCC in January proposed licensing a new low-power FM service covering stations with 100 to 1,000 watts of power, it also proposed licensing a third "microradio" class to include stations transmitting less than 100 watts

of power. Low-power proponents asserted that such a service would offset what they term "bland programming" on the nation's larger conglomerate-owned stations.

"We are licensed as cable FM and AM," Ladd said. "We won't be licensed if we go FM."

The National Association of Broadcasters, however, opposed the creation of low-power FM service, fearing that its creation could stifle commercial FM stations and clutter the band.

"We strongly believe that programming diversity has never been greater," said Dennis Wharton, NAB senior vice president of corporate communications, in a statement to the press. "The average listener tunes in more than three hours a day."

Nonetheless, 29 congressional leaders,

***'We're not mainstream. It's college alternative yet with a mix of styles.'***

--Program Director Paul Ladd

including two House Telecommunication Subcommittee members, Reps. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif. and Al Wynn, D-Md., in a letter to FCC Chairman Bill Kennard, expressed support of low-power stations.

Ladd, a senior broadcasting student, said he worried for the VCU station's fu-

ture but remains confident that it will be positive. He said its viability as a learning tool for broadcasting students cannot be undervalued.

"Clearly," VCU President Eugene P. Trani said, "as another educational opportunity for students... it (WVCW) ben-

***'The average listener tunes in more than three hours a day.'***

-- NAB Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications Dennis Wharton

efits the students for mass communications."

VCU, Trani said, offers a radio course taught by Robert Fleskes of XL-102 to help develop radio broadcasters for the institution including WVCW.

Ladd equated the station's position on the job.

"It (WVCW) provides a good learning experience for the students," Ladd said. "It gives them a good basis for learning being on the air. It's on-the-air job experience."

Still, he said, the station's outdated equipment needs replaced, but Trani indicated that budgetary problems could present an obstacle to the station's future regardless of new equipment.

"I do not know the answer," Trani said when asked about WVCW's future. "There are budgetary problems for the radio sta-

tion and the university. It will be difficult to have budget increases."

In all, 55 students work on-air shifts at WVCW while three serve in the staff positions of general manager, program director and music director.

Despite the student interest, Ladd said, the station's biggest problem concerns "people being able to hear us. We've had calls from listeners in the Fan area and in some of the dorms, but most people don't even know we exist."

He said the station works daily on ways to improve its listenership.

"Besides the possibility of going FM," Ladd said, "we can let people know how they can get cable radio in their houses. Putting up fliers around school... stuff like that."

Trani said he lives too far from school to pick up the station's signal, and when he does listen to the radio it's usually in a-

***'There are budgetary problems for the radio station and the university. It will be difficult to have budget increases.'***

-- VCU President Eugene P. Trani

tional Public Radio, WCVE-FM.

"I do not listen to our radio at work," he said.

The University of Richmond's radio station, WDIC, provides a much larger listener base than WVCW partly because of its FCC license to broadcast on the FM dial.

WDIC's incoming general manager Jim Copenhafer said the station's license enhances its "alternative" format.

"There has been a dramatic increase in listener response," Copenhafer said, since the station was licensed as an FM station because people perceive it as more legitimate now.

Both Ladd and Copenhafer said neither station accepts advertising. As a result, each agreed, their formats can have more leeway.

"We can be more free with what we play," Ladd said.

Another aspect of each station's self-dependency involves university interaction.

"We have an advisor," Copenhafer said, "but they pretty much let us run things ourselves."

Similarly, Ladd said on some occasions the station and the university's administration interact.

"Mostly, VCU has an authoritative role," he said.



**DISC JOCKEY. In the control room, Adam Strauss takes a break from being a broadcaster while a CD plays a song over 640 AM WVCW.**